

Chapter 1

The Future State

Do you know, with absolute clarity, where you are going in business and why? What compels you to jump out of bed in the morning, eager to put yourself through all the trials, tribulations and, of course, excitement that are synonymous with growing a successful business? Do you have an underlying sense of purpose that gets you through the tough times and lets you celebrate the good times, because you know everything you do in business is moving you closer to what you want to achieve in your life?

If you do, then you know your Future State. You know what you want out of life and when and how you will achieve it, through your business. The chances are that you have never written it down, not in a way that makes it meaningful; a personal statement of intent and direction.

A common excuse given by entrepreneurs for not writing it down is that it is all in their heads. The problem is, heads get filled up with all sorts of other stuff, especially when running a business entails thinking about a million things. Future States can then become mentally mislaid. You find yourself making misdirected decisions and no longer moving closer to what you want out of life. Writing it down, pinning it to your wall, having it permanently on your desktop, means that you are far less likely to be distracted or diverted from achieving your Future State through growing a life led business.

You may have a business plan. If you do, it is undoubtedly a lengthy document (certainly more than a page) that has been written with a huge investment of your time and energy for someone else's purpose, usually applying for funding. Business plans certainly have value in that they achieve an end and can provide a process for you to follow. In truth, though, as the person who leads your business and who must constantly create, innovate and energise everyone else, a business plan does little for you as a working document. When did you last look at a business plan?

Is a business really a machine, where everything is always orderly and in place and measured, as business plans would have you believe? The shelf life of a business plan is about the same as today's headlines, the ink is not even dry when some completely unforeseen challenge arises. That might be a new competitor, or it may be something more personal. That is the reason business plans have such low credibility in the business community. Traditional business planning is inflexible by design and fails to reflect the constant pressures and unpredictability of enterprise.

A business journey does not conveniently follow a straight line. It is a series of unpredictable events, causing peaks and troughs of pressure. Success depends on how fast you recognise when you have been pulled off the path and whether you have the capability and creativity to do something to make an adjustment and return. In textbooks they call this *strategic drift*, reacting rather than proactively leading.

When you are thinking of taking on a new contract because of profit, ask yourself how this contributes to reaching your Future State, as quickly and economically as possible. You might be pleased to be making some profits but at what cost? Potentially the price is your future happiness.

The most common reason for strategic drift is deciding not to turn work away. That may sound crazy, but your most precious commodity as a leader is time. If you do not spend every moment contributing to reaching your Future State, you fall behind each day. It is not about how much money you have made. It is about achieving happiness in business and life. Creating wealth is a means, rarely an end.

In Life Led Business terms, money is something you may need to reach your Future State, whether that is spending more time with your children, travelling or a host of other things. It is unlikely that anyone's final words were "I wish I had worked more hours and made more money". The accumulation of cash for no purpose is as pointless as acquiring bricks with no house to build.

Short term focus on activities which fail to contribute to your Future State has a significant opportunity cost. It is time lost and means it takes longer to reach your desired life and happiness. You must create your own measures of success, personal to you, your family and business. That is a *personal* Future State.

A New Way Forward

Those thousands of books on enterprise have not made a single dent in one of the most depressing statistics in business. On average, more than half of start-up businesses fail within five years in the United Kingdom. These figures are not an anomaly. The Government's own statistics evidence that,

over the past twenty years, the failure rate has rarely shifted. Worse still, business survival is on the decline (see Appendix B).

It is not for lack of effort. Successive Governments have tried in vain to shift this figure by investing in business support. No entrepreneur sets out to fail; they all try their utmost to succeed. And it is not for lack of training, as billions have been invested by both Government and private sector. Therefore, logic says that it must be the wrong kind of training.



“I think my test results are a pretty good indication of your abilities as a teacher.”

Look at the survival rate of businesses; the statistics do not lie. If you choose to follow the ‘business by numbers’ path, then accept that your chances of success are less than half. If you want to improve your chances, then clearly you are going to have to do something different.

When you remove life from the business equation, when cataclysmic events occur – and they will - business leaders are unprepared to deal with these

situations. They may well know how to read a set of accounts, to improve systems and recruit people, but that will not save their business in these 'stretch' moments. *You* are the only person that can do that.

Life goals must predominate. because they are why we put ourselves through the act of business in the first place.

Enterprise is the act of creating something from nothing. You can complicate it if you want to (and many do) but being entrepreneurial is your primary purpose as a business leader. Life pressures will try and stop you doing this constantly and a life-long study of nuts and bolts business knowledge will not help you in that situation.

What you need is a simple framework and set of tools to keep you honest, to keep you believing and to keep you happy. Because if you can remain consistently driven and focused, success always follows.

You must decide your own Future State, then do everything in your power to reach it, creating new strategies and opportunities, creating solutions to challenges and threats, and constantly driving forwards.

If you have that unwavering, focused sense of purpose and the time to create, you will achieve your Future State.

There is no 'one best way' to do this. One size does not fit all, however much people want you to believe it.

In this book we have attempted to distil the collective experiences of the happiest entrepreneurs we have met and create for you a framework that will enable you to join their ranks.

Your Future Statement

At the heart of your business must be your life. That means every time you aspire to a sales target, or new project, you are doing so to reach an end game, a Future State. This statement of your future must have three vital components to be effective. It must be:

Qualitative

Life drives business, not the other way around. But you cannot easily quantify happiness. As a result, you need to define what is your perfect existence. That may be spending more time with your children, or grandchildren. It could be travelling. Whatever it is, it is something you cannot do yet for many reasons, often financial, sometimes emotional (fulfilment).

Speak to business leaders and they will describe how they wish they could spend more time living and less time working. They wish their lives were not so filled with stress and pressure. They want to be happier. That is a pretty reasonable set of demands!

The solution lies in how you think, how you feel and how you live your values. These are soft measures, not hard measures, but we live in a business culture that says if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it, so do not do it. You must break free from that restrictive philosophy.

To achieve long-term success, you must go above and beyond in terms of your commitment and creativity, not just in the good times, but also in the worst of times. You will only do that if you can see a light at the end of the tunnel, a better life for your family, for your friends, for happiness. Not just for money.

That is why your Future State must describe what your perfect life in business looks like, what you want to be doing in your ideal world – in and out of work. There are no rules on this; no consultant or anyone else can tell you the answers; it is your life.

Quantitative

Your Future State is just wishful thinking without financial foundations.

You have taken the first step; you have written down a destination, but that is not enough. After aspiration comes perspiration, and if you are going to exert effort in the right places on your journey, you need to know you are on track. That means milestones and markers. Your task is to create, not wildly and without direction, but with focus and application.

That means you now need to translate those life goals into business goals. How much money does your business need to support that ideal life? How much time do you need away from day-to-day business to spend with your children? How soon do you want this life? These are measurable objectives – profit - time - asset value.

By quantifying your life challenge in business terms, you then create a framework that everyone can understand and contribute to. Of course, not everyone wants to know you plan to sell the business, for example, but you want the people around you to contribute to that goal. They only need to know the target.

Business growth for business sake is a far less powerful driver than goals linked to a happy ending.

For all intents and purposes, they are the same financial and quantitative targets you may see in any other business. However, they are entirely different, as the measures are derived from your personal life aspirations, not a ‘must grow for the sake of growth’ mentality. Consequently, they mean much more to you on a personal level.

If your life plan required you to make 25% net profit and you make 20%, your accountant may be delighted, but you should not be. Because you know you’re behind the pace of the plan. That means arriving later, costing you that time with the family. You should not be satisfied and must double your efforts.

When you use a Future Statement, you know that achieving quantitative milestones means something much more than financial gain. It is a reality check, a benchmark against which you can test your decisions. If it does not contribute to the bigger picture, reject the idea.

As an entrepreneur, your challenge is to create the exact set of accounts needed to create your perfect life. As such, the Future Statement must still include financial measures of performance, what the business looks like at the end game. If not, your Future State will be built on wishful thinking, not financial foundations.

Without a life-led Future Statement, you may still arrive in a happy place in years to come (although, statistically, over half of business leaders do not). But, you have far more chance if you define your desired Future State and write down exactly what must happen to enable that perfect life.

Time-based

A target without a deadline is just a dream.

Identify the month and year you want to reach this position in your life and business. It may be ten years down the line. But you must remember that aspiration every single day to stay focused on the Future State.

If you do not put a deadline in the Future Statement, you are not under pressure, you have less purpose, less drive, less focus. Your decisions are unchallenged as there is less urgency. Time makes you and your business, everyone in your business, accountable to each other. You know if you arrived when you said you would.

The cost of strategic drift is life and happiness, for you and your family. That understanding really focuses the mind, every day.

Close the loop

“Writing things down has four major advantages.

First, it takes all those fleeting worries and makes them concrete so you can see them and deal with them. Second, it makes it possible to see connections and consolidate tasks. Third, it lets you look at some of those things and let them go. Yes, I need to plan my sabbatical. But not today. I can put that off for a month or two and it will still be ok.

Most importantly, if everything is written down you don't have to keep thinking about it. Rehearsal is the process of saying something over and over, so you don't forget it. One of the reasons we keep returning to things and worrying about them is that we're rehearsing; we are returning to the same idea over and over, so we don't forget it. If we write it down and trust that we won't forget it, we can stop rehearsing it.

No open loop. No recurring thought. *Lower anxiety.*”

Psychology Today, 2015

You are going to have to bring a lot of people with you on the journey to make your Future State a reality, because you cannot do it all by yourself. These people need to understand how they contribute, individually and collectively, as a team, to the business journey and success.

You need to understand that too. Close the loop. Clear your mind and remove needless debilitating worries.

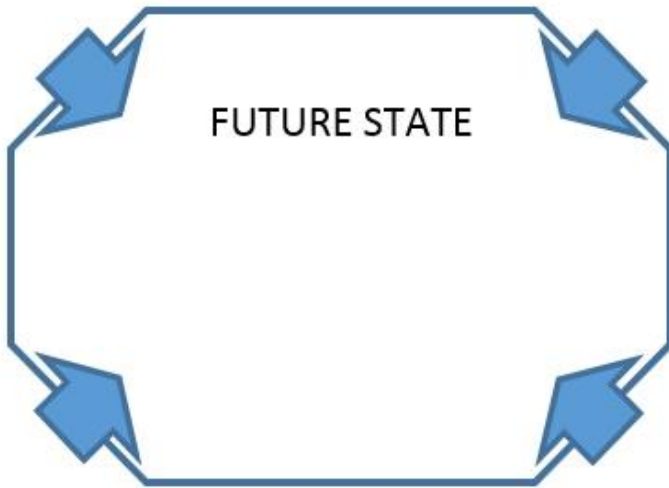
Keep it simple to succeed

Imagine your Future

When writing your Future Statement, you need to be brief and succinct. Avoid being generic, be specific and not limiting but above all, it needs to be personal to you. Write three sentences:

- what is your ideal life?
- what does that equate to financially?
- when do you want to be there (not how)?

Your Future Statement = Qualitative + Quantitative + Time-Based



If you cannot make your Future State fit in this box, it is still too complicated.

Need some help? See Appendix C for real business examples.

Life Led Business

Copyright © 2020 Business Think Ltd

The right of Elliot Forte and Jonathan Sharp to be identified as the authors of this work has been asserted to them in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the Copyright owner.

ISBN: 9798673489727

Jacket by Business Think Ltd

Cover image © Business Think Ltd

The "Business Think" trademark is the exclusive property of Business Think Limited. Any reproduction, whether complete or partial, modification or use of the Intellectual Property, for whatever reason and in whatever medium, without our written, express and prior agreement is strictly prohibited.

Intellectual Property Office trademark UK00003054843

HERMAN® reprinted with permission of Laughing Stock Licensing Inc.

John Tenniel's illustration The Mad Hatter Running is reprinted from Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and is out of copyright in the UK. Source: lewiscarrollssociety.org.uk. 17.03.16 The edited and abridged text of the Art of Money Getting by P.T. Barnum (1880) is in the public domain.

All copyrights are the property of their owners. Copyright infringement is not intended nor should be inferred.

Contents

Chapter 1:	The Future State	11
Chapter 2:	Building the Future	20
Chapter 3:	Life and Death	26
Chapter 4:	Prime Driver	34
Chapter 5:	Mind Control	42
Chapter 6:	Value and Virtue	51
Chapter 7:	Core Marketing	61
Chapter 8:	Core Process	75
Chapter 9:	Core People	85
Chapter 10:	Core Money	95
Chapter 11:	Start the Journey	105
Chapter 12:	Clear Direction	108
Chapter 13:	Navigator	119
Chapter 14:	Partner and Collaborate	129
Epilogue:	Let Life Lead	138
Appendix A:	Supporting Resources	139
Appendix B:	UK Business Survival	140
Appendix C:	Future State Maps	143

.....

For more information, please email:

info@businessthink.co.uk